

Affordability Policy Group

Rationale: At the national level many in higher education policy circles are expressing growing concern over college affordability, however, their conclusions and recommendations do not always agree. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2003) recently stated that college affordability was in jeopardy by documenting continuing cuts in appropriations to higher education by financially strapped states and the resulting response by colleges to increase tuition, impose new fees and reduce student financial assistance. In fact over 43 states have enacted or are considering tuition increases for 2003-04 to compensate for these budget shortfalls (American Council on Education). By contrast, a study by the National Center for Education Statistics reports that the price students paid for a college education, when factoring in financial aid, did not change for low-income students between 1992-93 and 1999-2000.

Purpose: As institutional governing boards set tuition rates each year, they must strike a delicate balance among sometimes conflicting goals: 1) the need to increase the state's educational attainment rate by enrolling more students in college; 2) the need to generate the revenue necessary to provide high quality academic programs and services; and 3) the need to provide financial access to economically disadvantaged students. At the state level, the Council on Postsecondary Education deals with a similar set of issues as it deals with the competing demands of quality, access, and affordability.

Council policy decisions in such areas as tuition, the biennial budget request, and state financial aid programs need to be synchronized in ways that support postsecondary reform goals. This policy group will work with our postsecondary institutions and partner agencies to better align systemwide and institutional policies and budgets with the reform goals of quality, access, and affordability.

Policy Areas:

1. Price (cost) of higher education and the need to link policies and practices related to tuition and fees, state appropriation, and student financial aid (federal, state, and institutional).
2. The increase in tuition and fees and other institutional services, in comparison to other states, and the impact on various subgroups and their ability to enroll, persist, and attain a college degree.
3. Student loan debt and its impact on college-going rates and degree completion.
4. The tradeoff between quality and increased access for students with various levels of college preparation.
5. Merit-based aid compared to need-based aid – and the optimal balance between them in the state's higher education policy – and implications for students.
6. Federal, state, and institutional financial aid policies and the funding that is necessary to sustain enrollment growth and support currently enrolled students.

Council members:

J. P. Davis
Charlie Owen
Joan Taylor
Lois Weinberg
Steve Barger, ex officio

Partners:

- Member(s) from Legislative Branch of Government
- * Member(s) from Executive Branch of Government
- Board member(s) from KHEAA
- Institutional President(s)
- Board member(s) from Independent or Private Colleges
- Outside Experts (higher education policy researchers/demographers)